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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a conceptual overview of issues relating to the education of the disadvantaged. Problems of identification and definition of the disadvantaged are discussed in terms of compensatory education. Concepts regarding "disadvantage" that underlie many of the compensatory instructional intervention programs are described, as are several theories on the nature and character of the disadvantaged population. Various educational approaches to the disadvantaged are reviewed, and the different implications of directing change strategies toward the school, the student and his/her family, the distribution of resources, the composition of the school population, and control over school decisionmaking are examined. Evaluations of existing compensatory education programs are also briefly reviewed. Finally, a number of issues that continue to be of concern to educators in the areas of educational equality, cultural differences, and social factors affecting disadvantaged students are discussed. (APM)

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Education of the Disadvantaged: A Conceptual Overview

by A. Harry Passow

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Education of the Disadvantaged: A Conceptual Overview

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1. Who are the disadvantaged-- concern with definition and identification.

Just as the term disadvantaged is one of many terms used to designate a particular population of concern to educators, policy-makers, and others, there are many definitions of the term and many strategies for identification and remediation. In the U.S., since the early 1960's, stimulated by a variety of educational, social, political, and economic factors, there has been an outpouring of writing and research and a mounting of a vast array of programs and projects aimed at providing "compensatory education for the disadvantaged." Yet, as I have written elsewhere, debate has continued around the underlying meaning and philosophy of compensatory education and the terminology used to describe the populations involved. What, for example, is being compensated for? Compensation generally implies deficits which must be overcome; where are these "deficiencies" located-- in the child, his home and family, his community, his school, in society in general?

Education of the disadvantaged is usually tied to the concept of equality of educational opportunity-- a phrase which, as James Coleman pointed out, has many meanings as well, whether one is considering the nature of equality or inequality. What should compensatory education provide-- more of what the non-disadvantaged/advantaged children are presumably receiving or should it provide children from low-income,

racial and ethnic minority groups with qualitatively different educational experiences and environments? Can qualitatively different programs be provided within existing frameworks or are alternative educational environments needed?

These controversies are not simply matters of semantic differences. The concept of compensatory education is intertwined with concepts of quality education, of equality of educational opportunity, and with the socio-political ideologies which underlie them.

Since the early 1960's, a variety of federal and state legislation has been enacted, designed as in the case of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), "to contribute particularly to meeting the educational needs of the educationally deprived children." Implementation of this legislation at the federal and state level, with varied degrees of success and failure, has generated controversy on the nature of these special educational needs, the causes of deprivation and disadvabtage, and the means for achieving equality-- equality variously defined.

The term disadvantaged is used to designate individuals and groups who are low achievers in schools or who are somehow restricted in their educational opportunities. While there are no clear delineations of the populations involved, it is clear that operational definitions are possible and that the pools in which the disadvantaged populations are most likely to be found are identifiable. At a UNESCO Institute for Education (Hamburg, F.R.G.) meeting a decade ago, we distinguished between the terms disadvantaged and deprived as follows:

Disadvantaged-- A child is at a disadvantage if, because of social or cultural characteristics (e.g., social class, race, ethnic origin, poverty, sex, geographical location, etc.), he comes into the school system with knowledge, skills, and attitudes which impede learning and contribute to a cumulative academic deficit. The disadvantage may persist throughout school life and contribute to restricting later economic and social opportunities.

Deprived-- A child is deprived if, for social, political, or cultural reasons, the "normal" facilities of the school system are available to him only in a restricted form.

Congress defined disadvantage in terms of low-income when it declared "it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance... to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute particularly to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children." [Title I, Sec. 101. ESEA of 1965]

In the National Institute of Education Compensatory Education Study, eligibility options for Title I assistance were explored, with low-achieving students considered rather than just the proportion of poor children.. The study examined the changes in the proportions of students served by Title I who were low-achieving, poor, or from minority groups-- changes, as the report puts it-- "in the districts' coverage of their disadvantaged." At another point, the final report notes:

> When Title I was enacted in 1965, educators and legislators acknowledged that the American educational system had largely failed poor and minority children. It had become apparent that a disproportionate number of these children were not receiving an adequate education.

From the NIE Compensatory Education Study's Executive Summary,

compensatory education is viewed as

> one of the Nation's most important efforts to equalize educational opportunity. The concept stems from the recognition that children from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently do not enjoy the same educational benefits as their peers. Many attend schools in districts that have low overall revenues or high concentrations of disdvantaged families... Compensatory education is intended to ease those problems by providing disadvantaged children with additional services to help them complete their education on more equal terms.

Thus, while not all individuals in target populations are necessarily disadvantaged, the population pools in which the disadvantaged are to be found in the United States are the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, and non-English speaking. Such children are clearly over-represented among our schools' failures and low achievers.

2. Concepts of disadvantage and bases for programs/treatments.

By necessity, compensatory programs contain implict if not always explicit hypotheses or theoretical bases for such interventions or treatments. For example, if experiential differentials or deprivations in early childhood are believed to account for low income/minority group youngsters entering classrooms unprepared to cope with the demands made by the school, then programs should be designed to compensate for such deficiencies. If limited language development is perceived as blocking transition from concrete to abstract modes of thought, the intervention should provide linguistic experiences to nurture such growth. If racial or socioeconomic isolation has negative effects on academic achievement, then procedures should be designed to provide a different racial and/or socioeconomic balance to overcome such isolation. Thus, there are a variety of concepts of what constitutes compensatory instructional intervention, and even as to what constitutes instruction.

The concepts or theses underlying many of the compensatory instructional intervention programs include one or a combination of the following:

1. Differential cognitive abilities exist among social class, racial and ethnic groups, and instructional programs should take into account these varied patterns of differences in strengths and weaknesses.
2. Cognitive deficiencies and language differences impede mastery of more complex intellectual processes and instructional programs should compensate for such development.
3. Discrimination by and differential expectations of school personnel, manifested in a self-fulfilling prophecy of low expectations and low achievement, results in short-changing schools in disadvantaged areas in terms of resources and facilities and offering inappropriate programs.
4. Intra-school and inter-school organizational procedures result in pupils from low-income/minority groups being assigned to or guided into programs which are qualitatively inferior. Compensatory intervention should provide alternative organization modes which keep opportunities open for all students.
5. Discrepancies in values and motivation between the home and school result in value and motivational conflicts, perceived irrelevance of school-related activities, and inappropriate achievement models. Compensatory programs should mediate such differences and nurture the individual's sense of fate

control.

6. Racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic segregation have detrimental effects on cognitive and affective development. Compensatory intervention should provide for positive integrative experiences.
7. Low income/minority group lack of power to help shape curriculum, select materials, and insist on high standards of performance contributes to low achievement. Intervention should involve the establishment of accountability processes and community control.

Long before the "Great Society" and the "War on Poverty," there was considerable evidence that "the social characteristics of the child's family affect his chances of success at school. As Boocock put it:

> Children whose parents are outside the cultural "mainstream" (although the exact "mainstream" boundaries are not clear, and may vary from one part of society to another, those who are poor and of racial, religious minority groups tend to be excluded from it) are less likely to have the kind of school career that in turn enables to succeed in the adult world.

As Keniston observed, "the perspective from which we traditionally define the problem of subordinate minorities logically permits only two explanations for this lack of success: Either there is something wrong with our schools, or there is something wrong with minority children." Keniston notes that the War on Poverty in the 1960s accepted and acted on both of these explanations-- "the extraordinary deficiencies in schooling offered minorities were rediscovered" and, simultaneously, "it was widely accepted that minority children themselves arrived in school with environmentally caused 'deficits' stemming from their 'cultural deprivation,' 'lack of verbal stimulation,' and 'inade-

quate home environments.'"

Ogbu estimates that 74 percent of black children would be classified as lower-class or disadvantaged and compared various explanatory theories as they applied to that population. He writes of four theories:

> The cultural deprivation theory assumes that black children fail in school because they are deficient in the cognitive, linguistic, and other skills that promote a white middle-class type of school success. The reason for their lack of such skills, according to this theory, is that black parents do not raise their children the way that white middle-class parents do. The culture conflict theory, on the other hand, asserts that black children fail to achieve white middle-class type of school success because they possess different linguistic, cognitive and other school-related skills that are not recognized by the schools for instructional purposes. The institutional deficiency theory maintains that schools are organized to promote success among white middle-class children and failure among black children. Educational inequality theory blames black school failure on lack of sufficient remedial programs to counteract the negative educational influences of the home and community.

However, Ogbu argues that none of these theories takes into account the nature of the American caste system with its history of exclusion of blacks from high-quality education provided whites or the effects of job ceilings on educational aspirations of minorities. He hypothesizes that "the personal attributes transmitted to black children in the course of their socialization may be perfectly normal skills required by their position in the caste system, although they are not the types of skills that encourage the white middle-class type of school success."

Boocock asserts that parents of school achievers expect more of children, communicate this to them, and, more important, teach them the behaviors required to fulfill those expectations. In her view, "what children who fail to 'make' it in school lack is role-playing skill,

not the desire to succeed, and because they do not know how to play the role of student, they are less likely to do the things that will lead to success." This, Boocock concludes, when coupled with the probability that the disadvantaged child will be taught by more inexperienced teachers, results in his "fulfilling teachers' and society's expectations for him-- and guaranteeing that he will remain at the bottom of the social ladder."

These different theories have implications for identification of the disadvantaged and for the kinds of programs which will be designed and implemented. With respect to policy, Coleman's report, Equality of Educational Opportunity focused attention on different types of inequality and on the significance of the child's home, neighborhood, and peer environment on academic achievement. The key issue raised by the Coleman survey, as stated by Guthrie in 1970 was that:

> the belief has become increasingly pervasive that patterns of academic performance are immutably molded by social and economic conditions outside the school. If incorrect, and if allowed to persist unexamined and unchallenged, this belief could have wildly disabling consequences. It is not at all difficult to foresee how it could become self-fulfilling; administrators and teachers believing that their schools and schoolroom actions make no difference might begin to behave accordingly. Conversely if the assertion is correct but allowed to pass unheeded, the prospect of pouring even more billions of local, State, and Federal dollars down an ineffective rathole labeled "schools" is equally unsettling.

Jencks and his colleagues reexamined the Coleman data and related studies and concluded that educational compensation was of only marginal value in terms of equality as measured by adult income. Jencks et al. concluded: "Neither the overall level of educational resources

nor any specific identifiable school policy has much effect on test scores or educational attainment of the students who start out at a disadvantage. Thus even if we organized schools so that their primary concern was for students who needed help, there is no reason to suppose that adults would end up appreciably more equal as a result."

During the past decade, the controversy concerning the nature and value of compensatory education has continued and successes and failures have had far-reaching socio-educational policy implications.

3. Educational approaches to the disadvantaged.

As Gordon put it: "The problems involved in the equalization of educational achievement patterns across economic and ethnic groups continue to defy solutions. The attempts at describing, evaluating, and interpreting these problems and the efforts directed at their solution are frequently confusing."

Some years ago, Miller and Roby suggested that various strategies for improving educational performance for poor and minority group children generally fall into one of five categories or combinations thereof: (1) changing the student and his family-- aimed at "'compensatory socialization' in which the deficiencies of the educational environment provided by low-income family life would be made up later;" (2) changing the school-- aimed at bringing about changes in the teachers, administrators, curriculum, materials, services, etc. rather than focusing on the deficiencies of the learners; (3) increasing resources and changing their distribution-- aimed at increasing the level of funding and also altering the integration; (4) changing the student composition-- aimed

at providing for greater socioeconomic and racial balance; and 5) changing control of the schools-- aimed at decentralizing arrangements for schools and providing for greater community control and involvement in decision-making.

The many programs and projects for the educationally disadvantaged which together comprise what might be called "the U.S.A. experience in compensatory education and intervention" are terribly diverse and range from preschool through college, from infancy to adult employment training. They can be categorized or catalogued in a variety of ways:

1. By target population (preschool, elementary, higher education, adult workers, teachers, etc.)
2. By nature of treatment (therapeutic, compensatory, remedial, enrichment, etc.)
3. By focus of activities (in school, family, community, industry, non-school agency, etc.)
4. By nature of services (instructional, counseling, community development, health, etc.)
5. By basic intent of strategy (reform of system, redistribution of power, integration, reallocation of resources, etc.)
6. By focus of diagnostic and prescriptive activities (learners, professionals, the education system, society, etc.)
7. By source of funding or legislation (Federal agency, state agency, non-governmental agency, philanthropic foundation, etc.)

These catalog sets are, of course, not mutually exclusive and

programs and projects fit into more than one set. Some compensatory education efforts are very limited and restricted (e.g., a Head Start class for 15 four-year olds), while others are more global and comprehensive (e.g., an alternative high school or a model school subsystem). Most compensatory programs are additive-- i.e., tagged on to existing programs rather than designed to provide fundamental changes. Some programs deal with personnel changes, some with organizational changes, some with curriculum and instructional materials, and still others with affecting the relationships among various components of the educational enterprise-- formal and informal, school and non-school.

In examining the programs and projects for the disadvantaged, it is difficult to determine where the impetus came from. At least two states-- California and Hawaii-- initiated compensatory programs prior to passage of ESEA in 1965. However, most state programs followed ESEA Title I, Head Start, Follow Through, Upward Bound, Job Corps, etc., and were modeled after Federal programs. The more than 30,000 Title I projects across the nation reflect multiple goals and multiple treatments which are not readily converted into overarching objectives or program goals. In fact, Title I is simply a federal funding program for the disadvantaged and not an educational program. Compensatory education in the U.S.A. is marked by considerable diversity.

Synthesizing the findings of a number of federal evaluation studies, McLaughlin et al. noted that it is the local school districts which have responsibility for choosing strategies which they believe will meet the special educational needs of the disadvantaged students

in the poverty areas of their districts. Some conduct needs assessments and then decided either to focus on a single objective (such as improving reading and mathematics achievement) or a broader range of cognitive and affective goals. McGlaughlin characterized the treatments and interventions as combinations of the following:

1. Functions-- e.g., increasing cognitive abilities, increasing the rate of achievement, improving the self/ideal image, and improving attitudes toward school work.

2. Agents-- e.g., regular teachers, teaching aides, parents, paraprofessional tutors, peer tutors, peer models, reading specialists, speech therapists, counselors, social workers, and computers.

3. Subjects-- e.g., primarily reading, language arts, and mathematics, but also natural sciences, social studies, cultural enrichment, and other non-basic skill areas.

4. Environments-- e.g., (regular) classroom, "laboratory", library special classroom, home, field trips, college campus; child centered, structured, open, small groups, and individual interactions.

5. Activities-- e.g., (regular) lessons, kits of special lessons, audio visual experiences, games and toys, dramatics, paying children to learn, parent training, busing, tutoring, and counseling.

6. Other activities-- e.g., health, food, and clothing account for a small and decreasing percentage of Title I effort.

Writing in 1977, McGlaughlin noted that some evaluations have indeed indicated the existence of positive effects and others negative but that "no studies have been completed that provide an unequivocal answer to the question of how much effect Title I has had on achievement." The NIE study has provided data on the scope of compensatory education, the range of services provided with Title I funds, the characteristics of students who received such services, and the nature of compensatory

instruction. One NIE study examined the effectiveness of reading and mathematics instruction provided compensatory education students, looking specifically at pullout vs. mainstream education, individualized instruction, and the importance of the content and intensity of instruction as these were operating in a sample of selected school systems.

In a report titled "Urban School Crisis: The Problems and Solutions," The HEW Urban Education Task Force urged the development of master plans to deal with the disadvantaged arguing that such plans

> must concomitantly deal with causes and symptoms, must be conceived within a framework of over-all urban problem solving rather than education per se, and must encompass all educational levels, i.e., from early childhood through higher and adult education. Moreover, this plan must reflect a considerable expansion and enrichment of what constitutes "education." Within the educational plan, there must be stress on developing and implementing appropriate curricular designs, consumer participation, staff development programs for all concerned, supportive services, and evaluation. Finally, it must be interrelated with other facets of the larger urban problems, such as housing, employment, recreation, and health.

Of course, urban education continues to be a euphemism for education of the disadvantaged and the HEW assumed the urban school crisis to involve the poor, the racial/ethnic minorities, and the low-achieving. But clearly, there are differences between the urban disadvantaged and the rural disadvantaged, between English-speaking and non-English speaking disadvantaged, between migrants and non-migrants, between various ethnic and culturally diverse groups. How significant are these differences for program planning?

4. Some major issues related to educating the disadvantaged.

Any discussion of the nature, identification, and education of the disadvantaged raises more questions and issues than are answered. Some issues that have been raised in the past and are of continuing interest

include these:

-- What concept of equality of educational opportunity should guide the planning for the disadvantaged? What are appropriate goals and objectives for such programs?

-- Is our current definition of the disadvantaged which encompasses poor, racial and ethnic minorities, and non-English-speaking children, youth and adults too global and are more discrete definitions needed for better identification of the disadvantaged?

-- How can evaluation programs of Title I and other compensatory programs be strengthened so that some of the strengths of a "planned variations" approach can be derived and dissemination of the significant components of "successful programs" be carried out.

-- Not all poor, minority group, non-English speaking individuals and families are disadvantaged in the sense of being low-achievers with low aspirations and motivation; what accounts for advantaged-disadvantaged?

-- Since education and socialization are not confined to "schooling," how can the school relate its efforts to those of other educating agencies and institutions so that they are mutually reinforcing and supportive?

-- Is it possible for schools to achieve a better match between the developmental patterns, learning styles, temperamental traits, and cultural experiences of individuals and the

kinds of curriculum and instruction provided them? What would it take to move toward differential instructional patterns?

-- Is there sufficient theory and research available currently to warrant drastic changes in our educational delivery systems-- e.g., residential schools, community-based non-school programs, total-family reeducation, voucher systems, etc.?

-- How well do studies and programs concerning the disadvantaged "travel?" Countries around the world are engaged in compensatory education efforts-- how useful are these reports to other nations and how can they be made more useful? [In a survey of a dozen or so countries around the world, one is struck with the similarity in definition, identification and compensatory education efforts for the disadvantaged.]

-- Without serious efforts at tackling housing, employment, health, recreation and other related problems, what are the prospects of school-based educational problems overcoming disadvantage?

These are just a few of the issues which deserve attention in our considerations of the educationally disadvantaged-- others have different issues to which they would give higher priority. It has now been more than two decades since the U.S.A. rediscovered its poor and minority groups. Program planners now have a much sounder research and theory base on which to design programs and provisions for the disadvantaged. How can we use these insights more effectively?

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